

24 May 1951

ME-36 - ONI CONTRIBUTIONI.B. Size, combat effectiveness and political stability of military forces.

The Union of Burma Navy consists of thirty-one vessels:

PF	1	ONI DECLASSIFICATION/RELEASE
LSS(L)	4	INSTRUCTIONS ON FILE
AMB	2	
Converted River Steamers (96')	2	
IP (8*)	8 (ex-US Coast Guard Picket Boats - 1 more scheduled for delivery 1951)	
IP (72*)	11	
Utility Barges	<u>3</u>	
Total	31	

The Burmese Navy has no aviation component.

With the exception of the ex-British frigate "Maya" and the ex-US picket boats, the material condition of the vessels of the Union of Burma Navy is poor and mechanical breakdown is frequent. All technical stores and equipment are purchased from the Royal Navy at Singapore. The degree of self-sufficiency is therefore entirely dependent upon the "reserves" of supplies carried in Burma.

The main supply and repair base of the Burmese Navy is located at Rangoon, and a subsidiary supply base is maintained at Akyab. Present facilities are capable of maintaining all craft with the exception of the "Maya", which has to be sent to Singapore for repairs. The construction of adequate storage space for a three years' supply of base stores for the new ex-US Coast Guard cutters has been delayed because some of the land on which the stores were to be built has proved too unfirm. At present six shallow draft river gunboats are under construction in Burma.

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Officers	161
Enlisted	<u>1,250</u>
Total	1,411

Training of naval personnel has been predominantly British in nature, a quarter of the officers being under British instruction at any given time. Although instruction of enlisted personnel in Burma itself is on a catch-as-you-can basis, and sea training is rarely undertaken, the current program does produce seamen adequate for the limited requirements of local river warfare. The lack of engineering training, however, has the effect of lowering the combat efficiency of the Burmese Navy.

Morale of both officers and enlisted personnel has been fairly high. Since the confinement of the small proportion of Karen personnel within the Navy to "rest camps", the loyalty of the remaining naval personnel has not been questioned.

Of all three armed services, the Burma Navy is probably the least susceptible to Communist subversion because of its long-time association with the British. The pro-British sympathies of the present leaders of the Burmese Navy, however, have rendered them suspect in the eyes of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Lt.Gen. Ne Win. When the latter was Defense Minister his efforts to discredit these officers and to have them replaced with politically reliable but professionally incompetent personnel constituted a threat to the morale and efficiency of the service. The recent forced retirement of the Chief of Naval Staff and the suspension of four junior officers resulted in the reduction of the pro-British element.

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I.C. Capabilities of military forces against individual and combined insurgent operations and against direct Chinese Communist invasion.

The Burma Navy has contributed to the success of the government forces in restoring law and order in the delta area and in securing control over the inland waterways. As a reasonably efficient force, the Burmese Navy can be expected to continue to carry out armed reconnaissance and escort operations along the inland waterways as well as operations in support of ground action against insurgent concentrations.

Any resurgence of armed resistance by the Communists against the government of Burma, if it occurs, is likely to originate in the areas of northern and eastern Burma adjoining Communist China, where the Communists will be beyond the operating range of the vessels of the Burma Navy. Should Communist armed rebellion expand from here into the lower reaches of the Irrawaddy, Sittang and Salween rivers, however, the navy may be expected to become an increasingly effective weapon with which to halt the Communist advance.

Assuming that a Chinese Communist invasion would be by land across the common border, Burmese naval operations against such an invasion would be largely confined to the Irrawaddy Delta below Hengzada due to lack of shallow draft combat types suitable for upper river operation. The only combatant craft at present capable of operating above Hengzada on the Irrawaddy and in the Sittang and Salween rivers in eastern Burma are the eleven old district patrol craft.

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These lightly armed craft could effectively resist a waterborne advance on Rangoon down the Irrawaddy by forces not possessing artillery. A somewhat stronger resistance could be made below Hennada as this stretch is accessible to the more heavily armed gunboats of the Burma Navy. This resistance could only delay a Chinese Communist advance in force against Rangoon via the Irrawaddy.

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